

Vietnam Aims Get Close Look From U.S. Team

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When Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara goes to Saigon at the end of this week he will have finished the most intensive examination of American Vietnam policy.

Going with him will be a new Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, William P. Bundy. President Johnson sent his nomination to the Senate with immediate approval expected.

Mr. Bundy brings to the State Department three years of defense-foreign policy Southeast Asia experience at the highest level in the Pentagon.

In their deep-probing five- or six-day stop in Saigon the McNamara-Bundy team will ask:

• What have been the changes in the admittedly confused governmental and military situation since Mr. McNamara was there in December, and particularly since the January 29 coup?

To Assess Changes

• Has the Khanh regime made any changes in nature or in timing in its military planning?

• How effective are the changes of field command?

• Is further United States military action necessary or not?

This American trip, with a stop at Honolulu to discuss the whole Southeast Asian military condition with Navy, Army, and Air Force commanders for the Pacific, centers on the stability and the ability of the Khanh regime.

When the McNamara mission returns to Washington in about two weeks the Johnson administration must wrestle with what can become the most significant decision since President Kennedy's decision to blockade Cuba.

Just as the key to the American security decision in Cuba had its roots in far removed Central Europe and the Soviet threat there, so American policyholders realize that over the next coming months they may be faced with a decision which involves the balance of power in widespread Southeast Asia, including Thailand, the Philippines, Formosa, and beyond.

Unanimity Sought

So far among the allies only the British, primarily because of their interest in the Malaysian republic, are giving the Americans any real useful advice and support in their assessment of Vietnam.

By the departure of the McNamara mission the new effort to more fully coordinate the interdepartmental policy mechanism in Washington will have made some progress. William Sullivan, the new chief of the reorganized Vietnam task force, will travel with Mr. McNamara.

An official who has been at the center of Vietnam policy planning from the beginning of the Kennedy administration at the highest level admits the Vietnam planning process is always difficult and uneven because so many people and points of view are involved.

He says, "This is an honest answer to your question. We are still having difficulties, but the differences are deep and honest and at various levels. No man wants to say he is losing a war. But there is no deliberate obfuscation. There are hard-felt differences. We are trying to work out unanimity."

Many observers regret the departure of Roger Hilsman from the job of Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs to teach. In a most difficult post he is credited with being courageous and honest in carrying up for his position on Vietnam policy.

Fresh Steps Due?

In the long pull what Mr. Hilsman perhaps will be remembered for most vividly was his momentous policy speech on Communist China before San Francisco's Commonwealth Club.

The first discussion of such a speech began seven months ago with President Kennedy. Mr. Kennedy felt strongly that fresh steps were overdue in trying to shift American China policy.

This Hilsman speech was cautious, but bold too, as he advocated that special attention be given to the next generation of Peking's leaders who might be more reasonable.

But no officials close to Asian policy today believe that the Hilsman speech has budged the basic Peking position. Their expectancy, rather, is that Peking is committed to an unbending, tough policy toward the United States for years to come.

Mr. Hilsman's successor, Mr. Bundy, while not such a deep student of Asian affairs, has had a broad experience with foreign policy, including a long turn of duty beginning in 1951